

The Sagano Scenic Railway runs the popular sightseeing train known as the Sagano Romantic Train, which takes you on a seven-kilometer journey between Kyoto's Arashiyama district—a tourist spot in the Sagano area famous for its fall foliage—and Kameoka. During the 25-minute ride, you can immerse yourself in the natural wonders of the Hozugawa Canyon.

Riding the Rails Along Hozugawa Canyon

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THE Sagano Scenic Railway was founded in 1990, when Kyoto Prefecture sought a way to make a disused train line into a new tourist attraction, with just nine staff members taking up the challenge. Since the railroad had been abandoned after the line went out of service, it was in a state of disrepair—rusted rails, rotten ties and collapsed road shoulders rampant with weeds.

As such, the staff's first task was to restore the rails and trail along the line. With the help of renowned cherry tree arborist Toemon Sano and local residents, they planted cherry trees and maple tree seedlings. In April of the following year, the first train went into service. The nine staff members handled every task from vehicle maintenance and

inspection to ticket handling and cleaning the restrooms, adhering to their motto of “the spirit of *omotenashi*.”

Originally used to transport cargo, the line's small, box-shaped train cars were renovated to carry passengers. The cars are pulled by a diesel locomotive that runs at a leisurely 25 kilometers per hour—about as fast as a bicycle commuter rides. About three minutes after leaving Saga Torokko Station, the train arrives at Arashiyama Torokko Station. After going through a tunnel, the dynamic beauty of the Hozugawa Canyon suddenly appears in front of your eyes. The train gradually slows so that everyone can enjoy the first scenic spot, the Arashiyama Onsen area. The train also lingers at JR Hozukyo Station, whose platform is built above the river's waters and around the bridge that spans the Hozu River, giving passengers plenty of chances to appreciate the winding cliff walls.



The Sagano Scenic Railway

The Sagano Scenic Railway during the height of fall



At one of the stations along the way visitors can stop by the popular Arashiyama Bamboo Grove



This charming train is popular with locals and visitors from overseas



The train offers stunning views of the Hozu River

Painted yellow and red, the Art Deco style passenger cars of the five-car train have a classical atmosphere. The simple interior consists only of wooden chairs and old-fashioned light bulbs, projecting a nostalgic feeling. The fifth car, known as “The Rich,” is an open-air car without windows. You can experience the wind, light and sounds of the canyon directly. There are no advance tickets for these special seats—walk-in reservations only.

The most popular seasons to ride the Sagano Scenic Railway are during the fall foliage period in November and cherry blossom time from late March to early April. Especially during the fall when the railroad is illuminated and special evening trains with box seats become available, the cars are filled to capacity daily, boarding about five thousand passengers on the busiest days.

“Aside from these peak seasons, I also recommend savoring the different seasonal faces of the canyon,

such as the fresh greens of summer, the deep greens in early autumn, and the snow-covered scenery in winter,” says the public relations manager of Sagano Scenic Railway’s department of general affairs.

The areas around the train’s stations also offer various attractions. From Saga Torokko Station, Tenryuji Temple and the famous Arashiyama Bamboo Grove are within walking distance. By renting a bicycle, you can extend your explorations to Okusaga, where Nenbutsuji Temple and traditional thatched houses await. From Kameoka Torokko Station, the end of the line, you can take a horse carriage to the Hozugawa River Boat Ride boarding site and take a cruise downriver. It is also fun to get off at the unstaffed, quiet Hozukyo Torokko Station in the middle of the route and go trekking through the mesmerizing beauty of nature.

When in Kyoto, be sure to make time for a relaxing train trip on this line to experience the beauty of the four seasons of Hozugawa Canyon. **7**